

CONSTRAINTS AS PERCEIVED BY THE STUDENTS OF AGRICULTURE HAMPERING THEIR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

ARTHY. K. G¹ & ARUNACHALAM. R²

¹Student, Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Sociology, TNAU, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

²Professor, Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Sociology, TNAU, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

Every state agricultural university in India is taking up sincere efforts to boost up the academic performance of the students. But still there existed a lot of constraints hampering the academic performance of the students. Several research studies also confirm the same fact. The present study has been conducted in Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, among M. Sc (Agri) students, of the selected constituent colleges. The sample size contains 117 respondents. The respondents were selected by employing the proportionate random sampling method. Ex-post facto research design has been used in this study. Data were collected by employing well-structured and standardized interview schedule. Percentage analysis were done to get a meaningful interpretation of the results. The perceived constraints of the respondents were grouped into major categories related with the educational system, courses and teaching methods, research programmes, knowledge and upgradation opportunities, provision of mental support, hostel and other infrastructural facilities.

KEYWORDS: Constraints & Academic Achievements

Received: Mar 14, 2019; **Accepted:** Apr 04, 2019; **Published:** Apr 24, 2019; **Paper Id.:** IJASRJUN20199

INTRODUCTION

In the modern age of competition and perfection every human being strives for success. For student, success implies academic success which should be well matched with pillars on which the future successes of their lives stand. Academic achievement plays an important role in the attainment of ideal and harmonious development of the students.

The term 'academic achievement' refers to the degree of success or level of attainment by pupil in the scholastic or the curricular subjects prescribed within the syllabus. In brief academic achievement is the amount of knowledge derived from learning in the classroom.

Achievement is the end-product of all educational endeavours. It refers to any desirable learning that is observed in the students. Any behaviour that is learnt may come within the scope of achievement. Academic accomplishments of a student can be found through his habit of reading. Academic awards and reading are connected and dependent on each other. Mostly, students come from various environments and places with different degrees of academic awards.

The state agricultural universities and the ICAR takes up active role in designing the career oriented courses for the students. Constant efforts were taken up to maintain the quality teaching, research and extension throughout India. Apart from mandatory courses, the co-curricular and extra-curricular programmes also tend to shape up the academic achievements of the students.

Every state agricultural university in India is taking up sincere efforts to boost up the academic performance of the students. But still there existed a lot of constraints hampering the academic performance of the students. Several research studies also confirm the same fact.

In this line, Tamboli et al., (2013) confronted the problems occurring in SAUs viz (i) traditional method of teaching material and aids with age-old lecture notes, (ii) lack of good textbooks combining theory and case studies in the Indian context, (iii) inability of most of the faculty to inspire and motivate students and promote interactive classes, and (iv) ineffective communication skills of faculty.

Sridevikrishnaveni (2015) expressed that majority of the respondents (54.60%) indicated that monotonous continuous lecturing as a constraint. Forty percentage of the respondents felt that lack of practical field exposure for practicing the technologies as a prime constraint. The other major constraints were lack of money and time to practice in the field level.

In a study related with open and distance learning, Abinaya (2016) reported that nearly two fourth (72.20%) of the respondents pointed out the delayed starting of a batch as a major constraint. The majority (66.70 per cent) of the respondents opined that the lack of accommodation facility on the major problem for them. Further, 62.00 per cent respondents felt that the number of personal contact programmes conducted were not sufficient to complete the syllabus.

There was an another study conducted among the final year B.Sc (Agri) students of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University by Sridevikrishnaveni (2018), where she found that majority of the students faced problems with respect to the inappropriate motivational techniques, improper course curriculum and educational systems, more student -teacher ratio, inadequate evaluation system, infrastructure and supporting facilities.

Above studies reveal that the students of agriculture are facing wide varied constraints in their process of academic achievement. A thorough analysis of the above constraints would help to come out with appropriate remedial strategies.

Accordingly, the present study has been conducted with a major objective “to assess the perceived constraints hampering the academic achievements of the students of agriculture”.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study has been conducted in Tamil Nadu Agricultural University(TNAU) as it is one of the prominent premier universities in South India, engaged in Teaching- Research- Extension activities for about 50 years and further the entire growth and development of agricultural education, agricultural research, agricultural production and transfer of technology activities in Tamil Nadu is being governed and promoted by this university.

It has been decided to conduct the study among the II year M.Sc (Agri) students of agriculture under TNAU as they have already completed B.Sc (Agri) degree and could have come across wide varied constraints these days. There are four campuses viz., TNAU (Main campus), Agricultural College & Research Institute (Madurai), Agricultural College and Research Institute (Killikulam), Anbil Dharmalingam Agricultural College and Research Institute (Trichy) are offering masters in different fields of agriculture and hence the present study has been conducted in these four constituent colleges.

The outgoing M.Sc., (Agri) students (2017-19 batch) of the above four selected constituent colleges of TNAU were the respondents for the study. There were totally 352 students enrolled in the M.Sc., (Agri) programme in the

outgoing batch of the above selected constituent colleges. It has been decided to select one third of the above population as sample for the study and hence the sample size has been fixed as 117 student respondents. By employing the proportionate random sampling method the sample students from the selected constituent colleges were selected.

Ex-post facto research design has been used in this study. Data were collected by employing well- structured, standardized interview schedule. Percentage analysis were done to get meaningful interpretation of the results.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

The problems experienced by the agricultural students in their academic achievements were enumerated through an open ended questionnaire. After that the constraints were grouped into different categories and discussed here under. The results are given in Table.1.

Table1: Distribution of the Respondents According to Their Perceived Constraints in the Process of their Academic Achievement

(n=117*)

S. No	Problems	Number	Percentage
I	System Related		
1	Trimester system	90	76.92
2	Frequent revision of guidelines regarding thesis format	93	79.48
3	Qualifying exam	38	32.47
4	Lack of updation of syllabus	37	31.62
II	Courses and Teaching Methods		
1	Compulsory non-credit PGS courses	20	17.09
2	Teaching methods (lecture mode alone)	23	19.65
3	Limited practical exposure	72	61.53
4	Limited exposure visits	9	7.69
III	Research Related		
1	Improper lab facilities	82	70.08
2	Monotonously involved in research work	12	10.25
3	Publication of articles	53	45.29
4	Improper allocation of field area for research scholars	30	25.64
5	Improper guidance and lack of time allotment for students by their research guide	81	69.23
6	Time limitation for working in lab	39	33.33
7	Non –provision of fund for students research work	92	78.63
IV	Knowledge Upgradation/ Development Related		
1	Lack of advanced facilities in library	75	64.10
2	Lack of training and workshops	35	29.91
3	Lack of technical guidance regarding research related softwares	14	11.96
4	Lack of specialised staff in curriculum	66	56.41
V	Career Guidance and Moral Support Related		
1	Lack of psychological support to students	65	55.55
2	Career guidance	32	27.35
VI	Infrastructural Facilities Related		
1	Wi-fi facility	41	35.04
2	Poor infrastructure for advanced research	10	8.54
VII	Hostel Related		
1	Hostel rules and regulations	44	37.60
2	Frequent changes of hostels	42	35.89
3	Lack of hostel facilities for other campus students	17	14.52
VIII	Others		
1	Increase in tuition and mess fees	70	59.82
2	lack of adequate labours	67	57.26
3	Time management	56	47.86

Table1: Contd.,			
4	No scope for extra- curricular development	50	42.73
5	Less number of remunerative matching job opportunities	48	41.02
6	Less consideration of students' view points	47	40.17
7	Burdening the students with staffs own official work	26	22.22
8	Forcing students to work in challenging topics which does not have any references	15	12.82

(*Multiple Responses)

Educational System Related Constraints

There are eight categories of constraints enumerated through this study. Here, most of the respondents (79.48%) felt that the frequent revision of guidelines regarding the thesis format has created confusion and fear psychosis among themselves. The TNAU administration has recently issued guidelines on the thesis format, referencing style, maintaining plagiarism standards and also publishing the articles in the reputed non-predatory journals in order to maintain high standard thesis research. As the students were very much familiar with the previous system of thesis research, they could have mentioned this as a constraint. Further, 76.92 per cent of the respondents, quoted that the trimester system itself a constraint for them. The students have completed their undergraduate programme under semester system of education, but in the post graduate studies trimester system is being offered. As the number of working days, evaluation procedure and the pattern of mark distribution are different in both the system, the students could have mentioned this as a constraint for them.

Almost an equal percentage of the respondents, mentioned constraints related with qualifying examination (32.47%) and lack of updation of syllabus (31.62%). As regards the qualifying examinations, the students stated that the pass mark for the qualifying examination is fixed as 70, unlike the previous semester system. Further, unlike the previous system there were number of failures and hence due to fear psychosis the students could have quoted this as a constraint for them.

In any development programme, when there is a mismatch between the previous system and the present system naturally there will be few resistance from the participant side as shown in the above results.

Courses and Teaching Methods

Few students (17.09%) stated that they have studied six compulsory non-credit PGS courses which includes two e-courses. The students felt that there were no guidance on the syllabus content of these courses. The majority of the respondents (61.53%) stated that there was limited practical exposure to almost all the courses as their major constraint. About one-tenth of the students (19.65%) stated that the teachers are adopting only lecture method of teaching.

A meagre percentage of the respondents (7.69%) opined that there were only limited outdoor exposure visits pertaining to the courses they studied.

The teachers of TNAU are taking sincere steps for the practical field exposure and also adopting a variety of teaching methods like hand on exercises, group discussion, buzz session and involving resource persons having rich experience in the field concerned. Despite such efforts the students mentioned that the lecture method alone being adopted and the practical exposure also very much limited. The students have studied their under graduation under the semester system and presently they are pursuing their post graduate education in trimester system. As it is a trimester system of education most of the time the students have to be in the classrooms and examination halls and further the entire course should be completed in seventy working days. This could be the reason for the above expression of the students. As

regards the compulsory non-credit PGS courses, periodic interaction meetings/sessions could solve the issue.

Research Related

There were seven constraints mentioned by the respondents. A vast majority of the respondents (78.63%) stated that the students were not provided fund for their research works. Almost an equal percentage of the respondents quoted the improper lab facilities (70.08%) and improper guidance and lack of time allotment for the students by their chairman (69.23%) as their major constraint. Little less than half of the respondents (45.29%) stated that they suffered a lot while publishing the research articles which is mandatory for submission of thesis. Exactly one-third of the respondents (33.33%) were of the opinion that there were time limitations for working in the lab. Further, about one-fourth of the respondents (25.64%) stated about the improper field allocation for research work.

The research students are normally extended the research assistantship through the externally funded research schemes. Such assistantship is extended to the students on merit basis considering the overall merit covering all the constituent colleges of TNAU. Further, the university has also extended few research fellowships (vice chancellor fellowship) on the selected theme areas. Moreover, national level research organizations like ICAR, UGC, Department of science and technology, Indian council of social science research and Tamil Nadu state council for science and technology, are also offering a number of research fellowships for the students. The research guide and the advisory committee members should sensitize the students about these research scholarships. In the recent years, the postgraduate students strength has been increased, unlike the past years and hence, the research guides were allotted with more number of research students (not exceeding four per guide). Moreover, the research guides who were operating externally funded schemes were allowed to guide six students at a time. Hence, there may be little difficulties while allocating time considering the individual capacity of the students. Few students felt that they were monotonously involved in research works, this could be because the research work commences during the second trimester of the first year itself and the entire second year covering fourth, fifth and sixth trimester were fully devoted for research works and hence the students could have stated that they are monotonously involved in research work. The students should be sensitized properly on the importance of quality research programme.

A considerable proportion of the respondents mentioned about the time restriction for working in the laboratories. Previously the students were given lot of time to carry out the research work in the laboratories. Presently considering the students safety and security, the time restrictions have been enforced. The research guides should sensitize the students about the very base of this issue in order to complete the research in the available time. The students also mentioned the few publications related constraints. In most of the cases, the students could complete the research/ experiments only during the beginning of their sixth trimester and within another two months they need to publish research articles in the rated non-predatory journals. Further, understanding the students' situations some journals also demanding a huge fee towards publishing the research papers. The research guides could solve this issue by properly guiding the issue by completing the research in advance so that the articles and research reports could be submitted in time.

Knowledge Upgradation/ Development

As regards the constraints related to knowledge development, the majority of the respondents (64.10%) stated about the lack of advanced facility in the library. The students were expected digitalised sources of literature and integration of different national and international libraries so as to get latest technical know-how related to their research

work. The university administration could take the necessary steps for the provision of possible modern facilities as expected by the students. Little more than half of the respondents (56.41%) mentioned about the lack of specialized staff in curriculum. About thirty percentage of the respondents (29.91%) opined that there were lack of opportunities for training and workshops. Few respondents (11.96%) stated that they suffered due to lack of technical guidance while handling the newly introduced softwares related with referencing, plagiarism management and modern methods of data analysis. The above issues could be well settled by the head of the departments.

Career Guidance and Moral Support

It is interesting to note that the majority of the respondents (55.55%) have suffered due to a lack of psychological support. As they are the second year masters students they are busily engaged in completing the research works. Further, most of the students after completing the master degree will be planning to settle down in some remunerative jobs and only a few may opt for doctoral studies. Hence, naturally they will be seeking psychological support and guidance in line with their future aspirations. Around thirty percentage of the respondents (27.35%) mentioned about the lack of career guidance opportunities for them. There is a separate career guidance and placement cell functioning with the university. Although they arrange periodic campus interviews, students expect more of guidance related to career guidance, personality development programmes and motivational lectures. The department concerned could take appropriate steps to solve this issue.

Infrastructural Facilities Related

Around one-third of the respondents (35.04%) opined that the available wi-fi network is not sufficient to them considering the strength of the students, both in college and hostel premises. They felt that wi-fi facilities are most required to update themselves with latest development in their field of research. Hence the administration should take necessary steps to increase the strength of wi-fi. A meagre percentage of the respondents (8.54%) opined about poor infrastructure facilities for advanced research.

Hostel Related

Little more than one-third of the respondents (37.60%) stated that the hostel rules and frequent change of hostel rooms have interfered with their academic achievements. Few respondents (14.52%) felt that they suffered out of lack of hostel facilities while carrying out their research in other campuses.

The hostel rules and regulations are made to ensure the fullest safety and security of the students, besides ensuring adequate comforts. Considering the past history and experiences such rules and regulations have been framed. The students should be sensitized about these rules and regulations by arranging frequent interaction meetings. The hostel administration should keep reserve few rooms for the other campus students whenever they visit for carrying out their research activities. Due to administrative reasons and other maintenance related activity, the students are normally shifted to other rooms.

Others

The majority of the respondents (59.82%) felt that they suffered financially to meet out the increase in the tuition fees and mess fees. Almost a similar percentage of the respondents (57.26%) suffered due to lack of adequate labours while carrying out field experiences. About half of the respondents (47.86%) stated that they were very much efficient in their time management activities. About forty percentage of the respondents (42.73%) stated about the less scope for their

involvement in extra-curricular activities and also lesser job opportunities for them (41.01%). Further, 40.17 per cent of the respondents felt that the student ideas related with researchable themes, their constraints and suggestions were less considered. It is very important to see that little less than one-fourth of the respondents (22.22%) stated that the students were burdened with the official work of staff members. Few students (12.82%) stated that they were forced to work in challenging topics on which no references or previous literatures are not available.

The above constraints could be solved within the limits of the research guides and advisory committee members. These expressed constraints of the students should be discussed in the common forum involving all active research guides and students in order to solve the issues and also to strengthen the student- teacher relationship.

CONCLUSIONS

A thorough perusal of the research findings reveals the following:

The students were very much disturbed about the trimester system as it is not mismatching with their previous system of education. The students require a variety of learning methods and more practical exposure for better learning. The students mentioned few constraints with their research activities viz., insufficient lab facilities, time restriction for working in lab, publication related issues, improper allocation of field area and lesser time allocation by the research guide. The students requested for digitalised literature and the integration of national and international library facilities. The students required appropriate technical guidance while handling research related softwares and applications. The students also expect psychological support and career related guidance. The students requested for the strengthening of wi-fi facility both in hostel and college premises. The students are financially constrained to meet out their financial requirements whenever there is a hike in their tuition fees and mess fees. Many research students suffered due to lack of adequate labour to carry out field experiences. The students required appropriate counselling and guidance to effectively manage their available time. The students required that they have to be involved in extra-curricular activities as available for the undergraduate students.

The administration may consider and take necessary steps to solve the above constraints of the students which may have a tremendous impact on the students' academic achievement in a positive way.

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